

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held at County Hall, Glenfield on Wednesday, 26 February 2014.

PRESENT

Mr. S. J. Galton CC (in the Chair)

Mrs. R. Camamile CC  
Dr. R. K. A. Feltham CC  
Mr. S. J. Hampson CC  
Dr. S. Hill CC  
Mr. Max Hunt CC

Mr. J. Kaufman CC  
Mr. A. M. Kershaw CC  
Mr. P. G. Lewis CC  
Mr. R. J. Shepherd CC  
Mr. L. Spence CC

In Attendance:

Mr. D. C. Bill CC, Liberal Democrat Spokesman for the Environment and Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee (for Minute 71).

Mr. D. A. Sprason CC, Governor of South Charnwood High School (for Minute 71).

64. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 January were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

65. Question Time.

The Chief Executive reported that no questions had been received under Standing Order 35.

66. Questions asked by Members.

The Chief Executive reported that no questions had been received under Standing Order 7(3) and 7(5).

67. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

68. Declarations of interest.

The Chairman invited members who wished to do so to declare any interest in respect of items on the agenda for the meeting.

Mr. L. Spence CC declared a personal interest in respect of the item on Home to School Transport as a school governor (Minute 71 refers).

The following members each declared a personal interest in respect of the Strategic Economic Plan item as members of District/Borough Councils (Minute 73 refers):

Mr. S. J. Galton CC  
 Mr. S. J. Hampson CC  
 Dr. S. Hill CC  
 Mr. M. J. Hunt CC  
 Mr. J. Kaufman CC  
 Mr. R. J. Shepherd CC  
 Mr. L. Spence CC

69. Declarations of the Party Whip.

There were no declarations of the party whip.

70. Presentation of Petitions.

The Chief Executive reported that no petitions had been received under Standing Order 36.

71. Home to School Transport Policy - Consultation.

The Commission considered a presentation on the proposed new policy for Home to School Transport. The Commission also considered the public consultation document. A copy of the slides forming the presentation and a copy of the public consultation document is filed with these minutes marked "Agenda Item 2".

The Chairman advised that the Commission was considering this matter:

- (a) As it covered the remits of two Committees. The Spokesmen of the Environment and Transport and Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committees had been invited to attend to express their views on the proposals;
- (b) As a consultee at this stage. The consultation would close on 12 March and the Commission at its meeting on 30 April would be considering the outcome of the consultation and the recommendation to be put to the Cabinet at its meeting on 6 May.

The Director of Environment and Transport considered the report and gave a PowerPoint presentation which he highlighted the following:

- (c) The Government had encouraged schools to be academies and therefore independent of the Council. The majority of secondary schools had opted to become academies. As a result of this, academies were increasingly:
  - Setting their own catchment areas which were in some cases different to those that had existed and crossed administrative boundaries;
  - Changing the age range of their schools with many coming 11-16 or 11-13 schools;
  - Discontinuing previous feeder school relationships.

- (d) Academies were now operating as businesses and were in competition with each other to attract pupils;
- (e) The local authority had to recognise this new reality and the proposals on home to school transport now put forward recognised this. The proposals aimed to:
  - (i) Ensure the policy was equitable and did not favour one academy over another as to do so would risk legal challenge;
  - (ii) Ensure that the County Council's financial position was protected as academies changed their age ranges and catchment areas, but were not themselves accountable for the cost of transport;
  - (iii) Provide clarity to parents so that they could make informed choices;
- (f) The option of a policy which would provide transport to the nearest Leicestershire school had been looked at but was ruled out following legal advice.

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Mr. Andrew Morris, Head Teacher of South Charnwood High School and Mr. Huwe Howe, Principal of Beauchamp College who were present to speak on the item. The Commission also noted a submission from Sonia Singleton, Head Teacher of Gartree High School and the comments of Matthew Parrott, Head Teacher of Shepshed High School and Hind Leys College, copies of which are filed with these minutes.

Mr. Morris delivered a speech which covered the following points (a full copy of Mr. Morris' speech is appended to the minutes):

- The proposed policy was unfair and unjust and discriminated against certain schools according to their location or diverse catchment area;
- The proposed policy would cost some schools money as they attempted to 'level the playing field';
- One size did not fit all;
- Exceptions must be made for some schools 'in exceptional circumstances';
- The transition arrangements for pupils presently in the high school of schools which are changing their age range to 11-16 were welcomed;
- Entitlement to free transport to school for Year 11 pupils (presently in Year 9) in schools changing their age range to 11-16 should be reinstated;
- With regards to the point above, rather than remove transport for Year 10 pupils for one year and then reinstate it in Year 11, the policy should continue to provide free transport to Year 10 pupils staying at 11-16 schools;
- "Parachute payments" should be given for schools hit hardest by the policy;
- Money should be delegated to schools termly based on number of pupils choosing the school (within designated/catchment areas) or based on present home school transport costs;

- Consideration should be given to amending the proposed policy to allow exceptions in exceptional circumstances.

Mr. Howe delivered a speech which covered the following points:

- Beauchamp College was a very popular and oversubscribed school. At present, it was not considering changing its age range and it was stressed that not all schools were currently, or wished to become, academies. It was felt that schools that were not academies were being disadvantaged by the proposed new Policy;
- The proposals would adversely damage the relationships and partnerships that had developed between a number of schools and their “feeder” schools;
- The proposals would add confusion for young people and parents making decisions about future schooling;
- It was felt that there had not been adequate consideration of the effect the proposals could have on congestion and therefore road safety;
- It was felt that there had been inadequate consideration of alternative approaches, such as delegating transport funding to schools or delegating funding based on traditional pupil movement.

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Mr. D. A. Sprason CC, who was present to speak on the matter as a Governor of South Charnwood High School. Mr. Sprason, whilst noting the difficult position facing the Council regarding academies and school transport, never-the-less felt it was important that, as a Governor of South Charnwood High School, he should draw attention to some of the issues that would be faced by the School, including:

- South Charnwood High School had nearly closed 30 years ago due to falling numbers. The County Council had helped the School by creating a new catchment area which included Leicester Forest East. This change had secured the School’s future;
- The new proposals would split villages and break friendships between students as they moved through their schooling;
- The transition arrangements were welcomed. However, it was expected that the School would have to spend around £50,000 of its education funding on transport if it were to continue to attract the pupil numbers it required;

The Commission then considered the following two documents that had been circulated earlier in the day by the Liberal Democrat Group, as alternative proposals:

- Proposal for Home to School Transport – Exploring an Alternative Policy;
- Exploring the Possibility of Subcontracting School Transport to Schools.

*(Copies of these documents are filed with these minutes.)*

Members of the Commission were advised that these proposals had been drawn up in

response to the consultation, which invited members of the public to submit alternatives. The Director of Environment and Transport advised the Commission that he had not had the opportunity to fully explore the options now put forward and indicated he would do so and report back to the next meeting of the Commission on 26 March.

A general discussion ensued and a number of concerns and questions were raised by members, including the following:

- The policy would have an adverse impact on existing school relationships and the work done with feeder schools to make the transition from primary to secondary easier;
- Parents on low incomes or those who could not afford the cost of transport would not be able to exercise choice;
- Leicestershire pupils would be lost to schools in neighbouring authorities which may make them unviable. A further question was raised regarding the impact this would have on the level of education funding that would be received in Leicestershire. Officers undertook to look into this and write to members.

During the debate on the matter, a suggestion was made that the policy should be amended so that free transport was provided to the “nearest school with available space for the whole cohort of pupils”. The Director of Environment and Transport stated that he would report back on this proposal at the next meeting of the Commission.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the presentation delivered be noted;
- (b) That the alternative policies now put forward by the Liberal Democrat Group and the suggestion that the Policy should be amended to provide free transport to the “nearest available school with space for the whole cohort of pupils” be the subject of further consideration by officers, and that a report analysing the viability of these options be submitted to the Scrutiny Commission’s meeting scheduled for 26 March.

72. 2013/14 Medium Term Financial Strategy Monitoring - Period 9.

The Commission considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources concerning an update on the 2013/14 revenue budget and capital programme monitoring position. A copy of the report, marked “Agenda Item 9”, is filed with these minutes.

The Director of Corporate Resources reported the following:

- It had been agreed in the MTFS 2014/15 to 2015/16 that £5 million of the £11.6 million underspend highlighted in paragraph 7 of the report would be used to repay debt. The £4.5 million contingency highlighted in paragraph 25 of the report was part of the projected underspend;
- The Council was robust in challenging carry forwards. They were challenged at officer level. Requests over a certain level were reported to the Cabinet for decision.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

73. Strategic Economic Plan and City Deal.

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive concerning the emerging Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) being prepared by the Leicester and Leicestershire Economic Partnership (LLEP) and an update on the City Deal. A copy of the report, marked "Agenda Item 10", is filed with these minutes.

A supplementary paper attaching the report to the Cabinet's meeting on 5 March on the SEP and city Deal had been circulated. A copy of this report, marked "Agenda Item 10", is filed with these minutes.

Arising from the discussion, the following points were noted:

- The SEP would be submitted to the LLEP Board at its meeting on 27 March for approval. The initial draft had been well received by Central Government;
- Transport was a key strand in the SEP. Work had commenced with the Department for Transport on providing the evidence that would be required in support of any bids for funding;
- Further details about the type of transport projects in the SEP would emerge shortly. Rail would play a big part in the plans, particularly with the planned electrification programme by Network Rail. The restoration of the Ivanhoe Line was discussed in this regard, though it was noted that the cost-benefit analysis of this work conducted in 2009 had proved that a case could not at that stage be made for this work;
- Some concerns were expressed about where the 45,000 new jobs would be created and the knock-on effects this could have on planning. It was expected that most of the jobs would be created in the growth areas outlined in the Plan and that there had been a joined-up approach, ensuring that this commitment tied in with planned development as set out in approved and emerging local plans.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Strategic Economic Plan as presented be commended to the Cabinet for consideration at its meeting on 5 March, alongside the comments of the Commission as outlined in the minutes of the meeting;
- (b) That a copy of the City Deal be circulated to Commission members when it had received the necessary Government sign-off;
- (c) That a copy of the business case for the restoration of the Ivanhoe Line considered in 2009 be circulated to Mr. Kaufman CC and Mr. Spence CC.

74. Date of next meeting.

It was NOTED that the next meeting of the Commission would be held on 26 March at 2.00pm.

2.00 - 4.35 pm  
26 February 2014

CHAIRMAN